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THE BIBLICAL AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTION OF GOD. II.

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In a previous article it was held that both modern science and the most profound examination of the witness of human reason, as well as also the historical interpretation of Scripture, show certain marked tendencies to agreement in the conception of God to which they lead. This general affirmation it is now proposed to illustrate in several important particulars.

The force of the illustrations will be felt, however, only if we constantly recognize the differences of form in which the Bible and philosophy present truth to our minds. The Bible—I therefore repeat—gives us pictures, “figurate conceptions,” concrete facts and processes of history, in order directly to induce the right religious belief and conduct. But philosophy seeks, by painstaking and subtle analysis, to satisfy, as far as possible, the demands of reason. We make little or no real progress in reconciliation, either by attempting to force dogma, in the name of the authority of biblical exegesis, upon reason, or by an unhistorical and exegetically unscientific rationalizing of Scripture. Let philosophy and exegesis both live and learn; and then the conceptions of God which the two present to us will progressively be recognized as fundamentally one.

The views of the Bible and of philosophy, concerning the relation of God to the world, are to be cited in evidence here. The two teachers are seen to agree respecting their doctrine both of the immanence and of the transcendence of God.

Philosophy, for its doctrine of the relation which God sustains to the world, is chiefly dependent upon the conclusions of the physical and natural sciences. A century and more ago it was largely given over to Deism. The science of the preceding age had been predominatingly *mechanical*, in a

restricted meaning of this term. The triumphs of Galileo, Kepler, and Newton, in explaining by a few simple principles the apparently complex movements of masses of matter, had made a great impression upon the minds of men. No wonder, then, that the laws of motion, as so-called "pure mechanics" dealt with them, seemed adequate to unravel all the secrets of the material universe. Since matter was dead, having never been alive, the presence of God Himself, in the material world, was not recognized as that of a *living* God.

Some thinkers, however, among those placed well without the pale of the Church, like Spinoza, had maintained the immanence of God. Others who, like that fervid philosopher and priest, P  re Malebranche, had not been formally abjured by *all* Christians, maintained the same truth. And then there were the Mystics. But such thinkers as these seemed (and not without good reason) to sacrifice the personality and transcendence of Deity to His immanence.

Orthodox biblical theology was at this time as thoroughly deistical as was heterodox philosophy. Indeed the chief matter of strife between the two was over another question. This question was whether God, when once banished from all activity in the world's ordinary course, could be admitted again in an extraordinary way—in revelation, or miracles, for example.

But the physical science of the last half century, or more, has been distinctively biological; it has even looked upon the whole universe as a growth, a development. Growth, development, and life, are closely allied conceptions; and the comparatively few and simple principles of "pure mechanics" are readily seen to be quite inadequate to satisfy the demands of a biological and evolutionary theory of the world. The conception of matter as dead, and as capable of anything only when acted upon by forces *ab extra*, as it were, is foreign to modern science. It is now regarded as quite inadequate to hold simply that all masses of matter are bound, under the law of gravity, into the external unity of a machine. All the elements of material reality, all atoms, as well as all the masses which the atoms compose, are rather regarded as bound into a living and developing unity, into the unity of an unfolding Life, under the principle of the conservation,

the unity and the correlation of multiform species of energy.

Philosophy has, of course, been profoundly influenced by the view of the world held by modern physical science. It has been led to reconsider, in a manner enriched and fortified by the discoveries of all the physical and natural sciences, its confidence in God, the Absolute Reason and the sole "World-Ground." In what science regards as correlated modes of physical energy, philosophy discerns the presence and manifestation of an Infinite Will. In the scientific principle of continuity, and the law of uniformity, philosophy discovers proof of the fundamental Unity of Reality which underlies, as it were, all explanations that appeal to finite causes and effects. In that order of nature which science discloses and praises so highly as of value beyond all else, philosophy sees the Life of Absolute Reason at the centre and circumference of all the concourse of finite things. In modern biology, with its wonderful disclosures already attained, and its promises of yet more wonderful disclosures, respecting the mysteries of life, philosophy hears a voice testifying to the truth that the world's living beings all have their life "hid in" the Life of God.

So pervasive and prominent has the philosophical doctrine of the divine immanence, in its revolt from Deism, become, that the dogmatic exegete raises, perchance, the cry of "Pantheism" against the conception of God which this doctrine maintains. And if it be Pantheism to teach boldly, and with earnest attempt at consistency, the immanence of God, then all the most influential writers on the philosophy of religion at the present time are indeed Pantheists. But, then, as has been well said, most of the saints of heart and of intellect in the Church in all ages have been the same kind of Pantheists.

But what I wish now to insist upon is this: the Bible presents, in its own figurative and practical and persuasive way, the same doctrine of the immanence of God in the world of finite things and minds. If, then, it be "Pantheism" to hold this view, with all possible thoroughness and consistency, the biblical writers are Pantheists from first to last, and without hesitancy or attempt at concealment.

The writers of the Old Testament nowhere speak of nature as though it could rightly be conceived of as an independent and self-contained system of beings, forces and laws. On the contrary, they constantly present *God* as the centre, source, and responsible agent of those events and beings which science considers as constituting the system falling under its own domain.* As to their doctrine of creation, it is scarcely necessary to say that its essence consists in making the world a dependent manifestation of the will and reason of God. His word is dominant and creative; He has but to speak and it is done; to command and His will is executed. When the earth brings forth grass, it is because Jehovah says it is to be done; and it is He who commands: "Let the waters swarm with swarms, with living beings."

Especially are all *living* things the manifestation of the presence and power of the Divine Spirit. The Spirit of Jehovah—the "moving force of His own life"—is the source of all life, the inner spring to the being of all that lives (see, e. g., Gen. 1: 2; Ps. 33: 6; 104: 30; 139: 7f.) It is this same Spirit which Job represents as adorning the heavens with stars (26: 13) and imparting life to man (33: 4). All life constantly depends on Him; other life is, indeed, a constant impartation of His life (Ps. 18: 31f.). The gift of offspring is a manifestation of the Divine life, due to the Divine volition. Every human soul begins to live, at the divinely appointed moment, by gift of life from God. He cuts the thread of human life (Isa. 38: 12); He summons the soul from man, resuming the life He imparted (Job 27: 8).

When the Apostle Paul affirms, "In Him we live," etc., he not only declares what was consonant with the philosophy of some of his hearers, but he also expresses the consistent tenet of all the Hebrew writings.

In general, God is conceived of as wearing nature like a garment (Ps. 104: 1f.); its laws are the expression of His power and wisdom, and the executors of His behests (Prov. 8: 22f.; Job 28: 23; 28: 23f.; Amos 4: 13; Job 27: 12f). Under other figures of speech He is represented as giving rain or withholding it, as handing forth wine and oil, in

* The reader who wishes to examine this claim in detail is referred to *Doctrine of Sacred Scripture*, Vol. I., pp. 229ff.

princely fashion, from His storehouse; and even as not neglecting the animals in His distribution of daily supplies of food.

So is there no evil in the city, but Jehovah hath done it. He is immanent in storms, locusts, plague and war. Heat, drought, cold and moisture manifest and execute His purposive will.

That God is Spirit is a distinctive and most important doctrine of the biblical writings. But this doctrine, as conceived of and taught by these writings, implies the immanence of God in all the psychical activities of man. For the Spirit of Jehovah is in both man and beast (Gen. 2 : 7, compare 7 : 22; Job 10 : 12; 27 : 3); and this Spirit becomes in man a spirit of courage in battle, cunning in workmanship, skill in poetry, song, and the interpretation of dreams, wisdom in counsel, rulership and judgment in the control of men.* Extraordinary gifts of any kind are to be regarded as the immanence of this Spirit, the "inspiration of the Almighty," in pursuance of the principle taught in Job 32 : 8: "It is the spirit in man, even the inspiration of the Almighty, that giveth him understanding."

That this Spirit dwells in man as a "spirit of holiness," of the revelation of religious truth, and the purifying of religious life,—it is of the very essence of biblical religion to teach. In the Christian believer's soul God's Spirit dwells as in a temple; and in the true Christian community as the immanent source and spring of all its life. No German or neo-Platonic mystic was ever more fond than was the Apostle Paul of representing the Infinite Spirit as *in* his own spirit; or—to reverse the figure without changing the essential truth—of representing his own real spiritual life as hid *in* God.

We find, then, it seems to me, that the very truth which the philosophy of religion presents as the highest result of reason, when reflecting upon the phenomena and principles made known by the particular sciences, is taught by all the most influential of the biblical writers, although in figurative language and so as to stir the practical religious life.

* Among other passages consider the following :—Gen. 40 : 38; Ex. 31 : 3; 35 : 31; Num. 14 : 24; Jud. 3 : 10; 6 : 34; 11 : 29; 2 Sam. 23 : 2; Isa. 11 : 2.

What, however, shall be said of that other complementary conception of God, in His relations to the world, which is ordinarily spoken of as the transcendence of God? Judging from the surface, the present state of philosophical opinion seems to hold this conception *relatively* unimportant. This statement does not, however, represent the real truth of the present condition of philosophical opinion. To do this it is necessary to raise the question, In what meaning of the word "transcendent" do we intelligently affirm or deny this of God? The full discussion of the divine transcendence would take us into the very centre of conflict between opposing fundamental views in the philosophy of religion. I can only indicate what the right answer to this question will be found to be.

The greatest of all philosophical problems now under discussion concerns the attributes of that Being which philosophy calls "the Absolute" or "the World-Ground." What are they known to be? And how may we know them at all? That the world of experience is a vast unity, all the particular sciences both assume and concur in proving,—more and more unmistakably as they advance their lines of research and review their successes. That this unity of the world of experience, with which science deals, implies a unity of real Being—an "ontological" unity—modern philosophy is almost completely agreed. Here Hartmann and Hegel, Herbert Spencer and the theologians are of one mind. This unity of real Being, the different systems call by different names,— "Force," "Will," "Identity of Thought and Being," "the Absolute," "God." But the Unity of the really Existent, as implicated in that observed unity of the world of experience with which science deals, is a postulate of every important school or phase of philosophical thought.

May we know more of this One Reality which is the "Ground" of the world of experience with which the sciences deal? Is this somewhat a Some-One? Is the "World-Ground" a self-conscious personality, a rational, ethical, and spiritual Life? Over this question, atheistic, materialistic, or pantheistic views contend with the theistic. It is the great contested problem of the philosophy of religion to-day.

In my judgment, the answer which the most thorough and consistent philosophical thought affords to this inquiry confirms that profound truth which the Bible presents in many figures of speech. For—and this is perhaps the most significant statement which can be made upon this subject—*God transcends the world only as He is a personal, self-conscious Spirit.* The immanence of God is beyond question with modern philosophy. His transcendence can be maintained only if He be personal, self-conscious Spirit. His separateness, His supereminence, His relation of supernaturalness—if you please—is that of conscious and rational Life. If He be personal, His personality *is* His transcendence; if there be no absolute “He,” but only “It,” then this “It” *is not* transcendent in any intelligible meaning of this word.

Now if we examine carefully the teachings of the biblical writers, we shall find them always assuming this truth. The language in which they teach it is, of course (as comports best with the divine purpose they serve), naïve, childlike, figurative, practical. They represent God as above nature, supereminent, not entangled—so to speak—in His creation, or exhausted by it. But how “above,” and how *super*-eminent? As a personal, self-conscious life, a substance that is a subject, a being that thinks, and feels, and plans, and acts intelligently.

How profound is this truth, and the extent to which the biblical writers teach it, will afford us topics for the next article.